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ABSTRACT

Second language students come to the class with knowledge of a first language and with understanding of communication strategies. Creative exercises must build on this basis from the beginning of the course. Short dialogues, structure drills, and controlled grammar sequences based on a real situation should be integrated into the course from the beginning. Because English as a second language (ESL), and second language teaching in general, depends upon the spiral approach, new forms must be taught in light of what students have already learned, and continuous review must be built into daily lessons. As an illustration of how these procedures can be integrated into an ESL lesson, a model is given for the presentation of the "going to" future. The warmup portion is a conversational exercise that reviews knowledge necessary for the new structure. Next, examples are presented and the class practices the structure with various kinds of controlled drills, such as short dialogues, role plays with variations, and substitution drills using pictures and wall charts. A functioal context is provided for all the exercises. During the oral practice some students can go to the board to write some of the exercises; these enable the teacher to spot sources of error and to help students connect these with possible sources in their first language. (AMH)

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Moving from Form to Function in Teaching ESL

Methods and theories of language teaching are changing rapidly. Drills and pattern practice have given way to "Notional" and "Functional" methods that attempt to induce the target language through a natural process while the traditional approach concentrates on bits of language by introducing new structure points in a form isolated from real situations. Long dialogues and extensive drills do not lead to full communication. They teach the form, but they fail to bridge the gap to full communication. Some limited communication is possible from the very beginning of a course; it does not have to be left to the end. "...all learners come to a second language with knowledge of a first language, and with understanding of communication strategies." (Brumfit:121) Granted, this communication must be tightly controlled for beginners lest an interlanguage result. However, the basic principle is sound if adopted as part of an overall methodology that controls structures in an orderly sequence.

Students need creative exercises from the beginning of their ESL course. For example, short dialogues readily lend themselves to a functional exercise of this nature because the students can add their own lines as they act out the roles and even generate their own dialogues based on a real activity or function such as introductions or apologies. Drills like the familiar pattern practice can be used to to give group practice in certain areas; however , the students need to cross over into real speaking situations at the same time. Pattern drills teach the students how to say things, but they are not functional or communicative. " The advocates of pattern drill give their students much practice in how to say things,divorcing this practice from contexts of real content, and paying little attention to what is actually being said." (Diller:69) 1978 The ESL instructors must encourage the students to generate their own utterances as soon as possible. Drills are helpful at various points in the lesson, but drill mastery does not imply control of a structure. Students must move into a creative phase. "...the goal is for the learner to gain functional control over the rules of grammar, that is to make the rules psychologically real." (Diller;1978: 142)

It is hard for the students to learn grammar points in isolation. True, structures need to be sequenced for low level students, but the controlled grammatical sequence can be part of a functional presentation based on real situations. The learners need to learn living skills as well as tenses and pronouns. "...a learner of a second language needs to learn the functions of

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language: how to make requests,apologize,ask for permission,etc. in the second language." (Larson-Freeman:221) Items are presented in the context of an activity. For example ashopping trip can be used to introduce verb forms and tenses,road signs can show modals,i.e. must stop,should slow down,etc. Building a structure lesson around a real activity or situation teaches living skills as well as grammar. Such an approach is more meaningful than the standard "John and Mary" drills.

The instructor's next concern is the knowledge that the students must possess before they can learn the new structure. ESL and foreign language teaching in general depends upon the spiral approach. New forms are taught in the light of what the students have already learned. Simple forms serve as a base for more complex ones. For example,"be" is learned before the continuous forms. The forms and concepts are not taught in isolation, rather they interact with previously taught material and with material in coming lessons. Order of difficulty is still important in teaching low level students in spite of the reaction to the traditional grammar based approach and the new methods that have arisen. Some of these methods use a semantic approach without much regard for the traditional order of difficulty. The notional functional syllabusus, for example, teach chunks of language built around semantic and situational catagories. However, there is a danger that the learners will be overloaded at the beginning level. " But to begin

the teaching of language in its full functional use without regard to the difficulty of the grammatical complexities involved will result in overloading the acquisition capacity of students and produce unnecessary frustration." (Lado:232) Lado warns against trading a regular sequential grammar for a "grammar of functions." Structures need to be sequenced for beginners even in a functional approach. The instructor controls this sequencing and insures that the learners progress at a steady rate without having to backtrack. " Second-language material must build on what students know and what arouses their curiosity and interest at their age and in their circumstances, if it is to be effectively integrated into stored experience." (Rivers and Melvin: 168)

The spiral approach has been criticized for not being communicative: "A grammatically sequenced syllabus will distort any attempt at real communication." (Krashen: 104) Krashen states that such approaches are often uninteresting or else they present a structure only once. " If the form is not 'mastered' the first time around, the review lesson, in most texts, provides little additional help." (Krashen: 104) His criticism is valid if the structures are taught in isolation and apart from real situations. It takes more than "John and Mary" drills to allow the students to learn the modals for example. This approach will teach the form, but not the function. However, we must not neglect a careful sequencing of structures in our zeal to adopt new approaches. Beginners need to learn the grammar in sequence. Continuous review is provided on a daily basis apart from "review lessons" in the text as the students participate in conversation, reading and writing classes and creative lab exercises where students solve problems rather than just repeating drills. Most college based intensive ESL programs offer reading,writing and conversation classes in addition to the core grammar class. In these classes students need to apply what they have learned and constantly review past knowledge. Reading and writing can be communicative functional activities too. Free communication is limited in the low levels, but even beginners can describe a scene using "be". Any writing drill is a functional communicative exercise if it goes beyond the mechan ical exercises which are necessary to get the students used to the form of the language.

The new target structure must be introduced in a meaningful context built upon what has gone before. Such an orderly progression inspires confidence in the class because the learners feel a sense of accomplishment after having mastered each step. Also, each sequential step forces a review of the preceding steps. For example, the present continuous reviews "be", word order, pronouns questions, negatives, vocabulary and pronunciation to name a few. AS the students learn the target structures and review the preceding structures they gain control over various semantic catagories and communication skills. They practice using the grammatical forms in real situations such as requests, introductions, time, quantity and basic living skills. The categories should not dominate the lesson since the instructor does not wish to overload the beginning ESL students. Grammar, functions and communication skills need to work together to aid the students in their quest for language mastery.

The following is an instructional model for the presentation of the "going to" future. It is not meant as an absolute lesson plan, but it can serve as a guide to be adapted to the classroom situation.

6) TECHNIQUE: I usually begin the presentation with a rapid oral review of the a priori knowledge necessary to the new structure. A conversational exercise provides the best warm-up for the class. Students respond to real situations in the class by asking and answering questions about each other. Pictures are helpful as well. The students can look at a scene in a busy supermarket and tell what the people are doing "now." They should take turns asking questions about the scene while the instructor carefully monitors looking for errors.

Next, I provide some examples of the "going to" future orally and on the board. I make mention of real situations that the students will face such as "we are going to meet in room ____ tomorrow. The students repeat the examples of the target structure. This exercise is short and flows right into the next one where the class does a simple substitution of the subject slot using the students'(and teacher's) names. This kind of a drill is appropriate at this point because the learners are low level beginners who are just learning how to say the new structure. The drills provide a correct model and help reduce interlanguage-"... a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learners attempted production of a T2 (target language) norm." (Selinker: 214) Tight controls are important even in a communicative approach. A good exercise at the point is a short meaningful dialogue that contains natural examples of the target structure. Students practice the dialogue and role play, then they do variations and make additions to it as they immagine themselves in situations where they are discussing future plans. A good individualized activity for more advanced students in the class is for them to write their own dialogues based on the model and present them to the class. The main idea is for the instructor to start thelearners using the target structure. A simple rule can be put on the board during this time to give the students some guidance. I prefer a simple notation like S + be + going to + V(simple + (O) + time.

Now the class practices changing the verb slot. I try to have the learners generate the verbs themselves rather than just repeating a series of verbs. I use pictures and wall charts that show action; the class places the action into a future time reference. This type of exercise elicits real responses from the students and teaches vocabulary. A real functional context gives them an immediate application in a meaningful context. " It is the meaning of words and sentences that is crucial to language learning. Languages can not be learned without a situation of meaningful use. (Diller,1970:22)

By now the students should have grasped the meaning and form of the target structure. At this stage the instructor may wish to test the class with a series of transformational drills. The drills are short and help the students develop their conscious monitor. The monitor allows the students to alter their output and helps them avoid fossilized errors. College bound ESL students need to use the learned system of language performance because they will need to use it in formal situations. (see Krashen:1977:152-159) Changes in the subject slot force changes in "be". The cues can be oral or in the form of pictures. Students showing weakness at this point can do extra drills and practices in the lab or as written homework.

Practice continues as the instructor introduces various functional contexts where the students produce the target structure in contrast to simple present and present continuous. Since the class is at a low level, the situations are simple and familiar to the students. They may imagine themselves to be at the student center engaging in everyday activities while discussing future plans. Pictures and wall charts can provide visual reenforcement and add useful vocabulary. "... to master new words, a speaker must encounter them in actual use when their meaning and the style for which they are appropriate can be observed." (Falk:62) AS the students use the target structure in this controlled activity, they also review other forms. For example: today's situation-a busy office or classroom. Time is everyday Monday through Friday. Tomorrow is Saturday-a beach scene . Go over what Marcus does every day(or what he is doing now on Friday at 2pm) as depicted on a wall chart or on the board;then compare it with what he is going to do at the beach tomorrow. This exercise is controlled, yet itprovides for free communication;the amount of freedom is controlled by the instructor and depends on the level of the class. It is important that the instructor work with the learners and help them practice the forms in a meaningful context. The students can not really learn them in an isolated form."...such isolation and abstraction of the learner from the contexts in which the language is used constitute serious interference with the language learning process. (Newmark:162) During this time negations and questions are introduced and practiced. Weaker students might benefit from transform drills; however most students should already be familiar with the forms and they can move to real situations where they generate original questions and responses.

During the oral practice individual students should be asked to go to the board and write some of the exercises. A short writing exercise serves two purposes; it helps the learners integrate oral and written skills- a help for college bound ESL students- also such an exercise enables the instructor to spot potential problems that the students might have in that day's homework assignment. The grammar instructor must remember that oral skills do not always transfer to writing skills. ESL students who are planning to do college level work need to communicate in writing and reading as well as in speaking and listening. " Learning how to read and write, far from being a hindrance to speech, will act instead as strong reenforcement if it is done concurrently with, not before, or weeks or months later,(than) learning how to speak." (Diller: 1970:21-22)

When the students practice the target structure in a conversational interchange, they can also learn some of the paralinguistic skills that go along with foreign language acquisition. For example, learners need to predict regular speaker change in a conversation by distinguishing between regular and turn relinquishing pauses. ".. the signaling of speech activities is not a matter of unilateral action but rather of speaker/listener coordination involving rhythmic interchange of both verbal and non-verbal signs."(Gumperz:207)

7) PROBLEMS: Students will face various difficulties depending on their L_1 knowledge, familiarity with English structure and developmental errors.

Some will drop "be" from the form either because their L_1 does not have a similar form(Arabic is a good example), or else they over generalize and try to avoid using "be" in a verbal construction. Even if L_1 expresses a continuous form, it may be set up differently. Turkish,for example, has a continuous form, but it is indicated by a trapping on the verb stem. French has a future form with "aller" (go) but it is not in a continuous form. In addition to syntax, pronunciation will be a problem for some. The "ing" may be difficult for some learners, all will probably have trouble with the formal going to as opposed to "gonna." Some students will use "do" in the question form because they make a generalization from the simple present pattern.

The instructor can encourage the learners to overcome these and other difficulties by having them monitor their speech and writing. Those who have continued problems will benefit from lab exercises where they continuously check their progress against a standard model. Occasionally a teacher will find that many of the level one students already know the "will" future which is usually left to the middle of most ESL texts. If they want to use it, by all means they should be encouraged to do so; however, the instructor needs to be sure that they can handle the'going to" future as well.

The preceding method of presentation is meant to be a guide for the instructor. The actual method used will depend upon the individual situation of each class and ESL program. The final goal is communication and a functional knowledge of the target language. The instructor and class can achieve this end as the students develop functional skills and learn to control the target structures in real situations.

Figure 1 Drill (shows form,not function)

A. He is going to come. Make a question- Is he going to come?
Change he to I - I am going to come.

Exercise (shows form and function)

B. Tomorrow we_____ (picture cue) Tomorrow we are going to see a movie.

C. Complete the dialogue: (involves learners actively)

Maria: Hi Mark. What are you going to do tomorrow?

Mark : Well, I don't know.

Maria: Are you going to.....

(use students' names to add realism)

Figure 2 Drill

Change to passive: John bought a car.-A car was bought by John

Exercise with form and function:

Making tea; Cue: Heat water- First the water is heated.

Cue: Then? - Then it is poured over tea bags in a pot.

Cue : Next? - Leave it for five minutes. (using all passives would make the exercise sound forced and artificial. A functional exercise is one where the learners get involved in a real situation.)

Exercise:

You are going on vacation. Ask yourself these questions:

Lights off: Are the lights turned off?

Windows closed: Are the windows closed?

(advanced) Is the mail going to be picked up?

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